



# The elderly, the digital divide and citizenship: Cross-analysis of best practices

# State of play of the situation in the EU

- **20 % of people aged 75 years and older use the internet at least occasionally**, in comparison with 98 % of 16-29-year-olds (*Fundamental Rights Agency, 2020*).
- Older people who live alone are at higher risk of isolation and lack of access to necessary goods and services during the pandemic. **As shown by the partners' workshops, older women** – who constitute the majority of the oldest – **are disproportionately affected**.
- Further efforts to effectively reach out to older persons are needed, in particular older people living in rural areas, those with physical limitations, such as sight, mobility or dexterity problems, or with chronic health conditions.
- Programmes like Horizon 2020 (now *Horizon Europe*) and *Erasmus+* have had dedicated projects focusing on seniors' digital access and skills.

## Which problems do elderly face?

- **Lack of training/education:** Seniors pointed out their lack of basic digital skills but also mentioned that they are not fully aware of the possibilities offered by new technologies.
- **Lack of devices:** Mostly due to limited financial means, older people are unable to afford electronic devices (smartphones; tablets...). It limits their daily use considering most of them can only access devices outside their home which therefore slows their education.
- **Lack of understanding of their needs:** Workshops' participants highlighted that society does not yet fully understand what seniors require when it comes to technology. Though some digital tools are directly associated with elderly (such as e-health or administrative tasks), some work remains to apprehend their needs.
- **Lack of human touch:** Participants pointed out the risk of being left alone with technology. Many seniors need to be accompanied by people who can teach and help them along the way.

# Which best practices can be implemented?

- **Tailoring digital use to seniors' specific needs:** As seniors highlighted that their needs are not always fully understood or taken into consideration, it is important to make sure that the trainings or activities provided are specifically customized.
  - Example: In Cluj, activities from the Day Center for the Elders were converted from offline to online throughout the pandemic to ensure a continuity.
  - Varna implemented policies aiming at ensuring that seniors can stay at their home as long as possible thanks to smart technology
- **Importance of leisure time/well-being:** It is crucial to establish a positive link between digital education, new technologies and its everyday use. It needs to remain enjoyable and not being forced upon people.
  - Example: In Hamburg, Awo Aktiv organised afternoons for seniors to play board games and bingo via Zoom allowing people to understand that technologies are not only a necessity but also pleasurable.
  - Marseille's *Maison du Bel Âge* also welcomes seniors to entertain them with virtual reality.
- **Necessity to receive in-person help:** Beyond being taught to use technology by themselves, seniors are interested in having in-person contact to assist them (to fill-in documents online, better apprehend technology). Dedicated classes in small groups are therefore likely to be more efficient.
  - Example: Genoa's city services created a support network with volunteers to assist seniors in using online and digital support
  - In Rotterdam, elderly were assisted in filling out e-health forms

## To conclude

- Though there is a gap between younger generations (digital natives) and the elderly, **both groups are interested in receiving training and improving their digital skills**. For younger people, it can help their employability when it can help elderly to remain connected with the outside world.
- Providing seniors with digital skills can help them **overcoming a feeling of loneliness, fight against depression and prevent social decay**. However, to make sure that seniors are interested in learning and using new technologies, the first priority is for them to **understand the positive impacts** it can have for them.
- The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digitalisation of the entire society. Workshops showed that elderly were also directly concerned and that organisations and public administrations were able to adapt to this new situation. It will now be **primordial to ensure that this trend continues**.